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ABSTRACT

By building upon earlier studies of District 2 (Elmore and Burney, 1996, 1997) which have focused on the ways in which members of the district leadership community interact and learn from one another, this paper investigates the ways in which teachers think about, implement, and learn new instructional practices in District 2 classrooms. The paper begins with a description of the approach to literacy instruction that has been developed by district leadership, the Balanced Literacy Program, and the manner in which district leaders communicate expectations and provide support to teachers as they attempt to implement the program. It then examines how the program is actually being enacted in sample district classrooms, including the ways in which teachers appear to be interpreting what is expected of them by the district. The paper next explores the reasons behind variations in how teachers implement literacy, including the impact of school cultures and teacher comprehension of the Balanced Literacy program. It concludes with a discussion of the ways in which a more explicit articulation of teaching and teacher learning issues could be developed to complement the district's existing articulation of their systemic strategy of educational reform. Includes 14 notes, 2 figures, and a table of data. An appendix explains research methodology. (NKA)

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Content-driven Instructional Reform in Community School District #2[1]

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Learning Research and Development Center
University of Pittsburgh

June 8, 1998

Learning
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HIGH PERFORMANCE LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

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We would like to thank Bea Johnstone (District #2 Director of Professional Development) who gave unselfishly of her time to explain the district's literacy program, the principals who welcomed us warmly into their schools, the teachers in whose classrooms we observed, and the professional developers whose sessions we attended. We would also like to thank Sharon Nelson-LeGall whose guidance in the early phases of this work was crucial, the organizational, management and editing expertise brought to this work by Nancy Israel, the data collection and write up assistance of Ram Mahalingham and the data coding assistance of Melanie Jacobs.

Over the past few years, consensus has formed regarding the need for educational reform to attend to large-scale institutional change *and* to impacting the educational core (i.e., the defining of knowledge, student and teacher roles, classroom processes and learning activities) (Elmore, 1996). Uniting the goals of broad-scale and intellectually deep forms of instructional change has proven to be an elusive goal, however. Failures of educational reform are usually framed by one of two perspectives. Policy researchers, whose traditional aim has been to identify organizationally driven approaches that work across a broad band of classrooms and schools, lament the futility of influencing teaching and learning in deep ways inside the classroom door. Classroom researchers, whose aim has been to identify the details of intellectually ambitious forms of instruction and effective approaches to teacher development, lament the difficulties of studying and impacting more than a handful of teachers.

The story of educational reform in Community School District #2 in New York City has the potential to integrate knowledge from the fields of educational policy and instruction/learning. Recognizing that efforts to improve student learning ultimately succeed or fail inside classrooms, District #2's approach to reform relies on a system-wide plan for professional development and a focus on content-specific instructional improvement. The strategies used by the district include maintaining a tight focus on instruction up and down the line, providing professional support coupled with accountability, and developing and maintaining professional cultures in which continuous learning is the norm (Elmore & Burney, 1996). Policy researchers resonate with district leaders' goal to initiate and sustain broad-scale, meaningful change in all classrooms and all schools in the district. Classroom researchers resonate with district leader's insistence on meaningful, deep-seated reform grounded in the content areas and knowledge of how students learn. We know of no other district that has devised strategies for reaching all classrooms in non-trivial, intellectually consequential ways.

The High Performance Learning Communities Project (HPLC) has been funded by the Department of Education to study District #2's approach to educational reform. The HPLC Project has three overarching goals: 1) to study and document Community School District #2's strategy for systemic instructional improvement and how that strategy works at the district, school, and classroom levels; 2) to assist and study District #2 as it moves to the next stage of its improvement strategy, the development and implementation of explicit standards for student learning; and 3) to develop research

products based on the District #2 experience that will help other local school systems that are embarked on large-scale instructional improvement activities.

This paper addresses the first goal. It does so by building upon earlier studies of District #2 (Elmore & Burney, 1996; 1997) which have primarily focused on the ways in which members of the *district leadership community* (i.e., district leaders and principals) interact and learn from one another and how they set the stage for meaningful learning in schools and classrooms. By focusing primarily on the social and organizational features of the district's approach to professional learning, Elmore and Burney have provided crucial insights into the manner in which district leaders communicate, support, and monitor instructional improvement across all schools, all teachers, and all students. The work reported herein extends those understandings by examining the manner in which knowledge and learning are exchanged across *all* levels of the district's learning communities. More specifically, this paper investigates the ways in which *teachers* think about, implement, and learn new instructional practices in District #2 classrooms. By adding the ingredient of teachers' thoughts and practices, our intention is to complement Elmore's account of the organizational configurations for supporting reform with an account driven by classroom-based data and perspectives.

A key element in District #2's strategy of systemic instructional improvement has been the phasing in of instructional change by content area. Shortly after Anthony Alvarado took over as superintendent, district leaders began to implement their improvement strategy in the area of reading and writing. Literacy was selected as the first focus area because of its importance given the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the district and because it provided a ready way for the district to demonstrate improved academic performance in an area deemed important on city-wide assessments (Elmore & Burney, 1996). Since a content specific focus on reform is an important part of the District #2 strategy and literacy is the content area to which they have dedicated the most time and resources, literacy provides the basis for our exploration of the impact of District #2's strategies on classroom practice.

We begin the paper with a description of the approach to literacy instruction that has been developed by district leadership, the Balanced Literacy Program, and the manner in which district leaders communicate expectations and provide support to teachers as they attempt to implement the program. We then examine how the program is actually being enacted in sample district classrooms, including the ways in which teachers appear

to be interpreting what is expected of them by the district. We next explore the reasons behind variations in how teachers implement literacy, including the impact of school cultures and teacher comprehension of the Balanced Literacy program. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which a more explicit articulation of teaching and teacher learning issues could be developed to complement the district's existing articulation of their systemic strategy of educational reform.

Data collection included interviews, both formal and informal, with teachers and District #2 personnel; observations of selected professional development sessions in the district; review of materials which district leadership either created or used as reference materials for developing their literacy program, and classroom observations in nine classrooms across three different schools for a total of 27 half-day observations. These sources of information are described in detail in the appendix.

District #2's Framing of the Literacy Agenda

Although providing wide latitude to schools in many areas, district leaders have opted to exercise firm control in the area of instructional practice and professional development in literacy. The district has played an active role in (a) defining *what* should be taught in the name of literacy; and (b) designing system-wide strategies for supporting and monitoring the implementation of this program.

The Program: What Should be Taught

Over the years, district leaders have progressively refined their approach to literacy practice--an approach that was originally based on extensive work conducted in Australian schools. The current model, known as the Balanced Literacy Program, is based on the belief that teachers must first know individual children deeply as readers; then they must assist them to advance to the next stage of learning, which is defined in terms of developing their repertoire of reading strategies, applying those strategies to master increasingly difficult texts, and becoming more independent readers. Using a tailored assistance approach based in Vygotskian learning theory, the program recommends that the *amount* and *kind* of support provided to students be continuously adjusted to their evolving individual needs.

During a typical school day, the Balanced Literacy program recommends that students interact with texts at varying levels of challenge in a variety of settings: whole class, small group, and independently. These settings translate loosely into reading to, reading with, and reading by the student respectively, each of which offers differential amounts of reading support (see Figure 1). Reading to occurs during whole-class *Read Alouds* when the teacher reads a carefully selected piece of children's literature to the students. The purpose of Read Aloud is to expose children to oral language, to new vocabulary and concepts, and to a variety of forms of literature. The texts selected for Read Aloud are more challenging than the students could handle on their own. During Read Aloud, the teacher provides maximal support by reading the text *for* the students and helping them to interpret it.

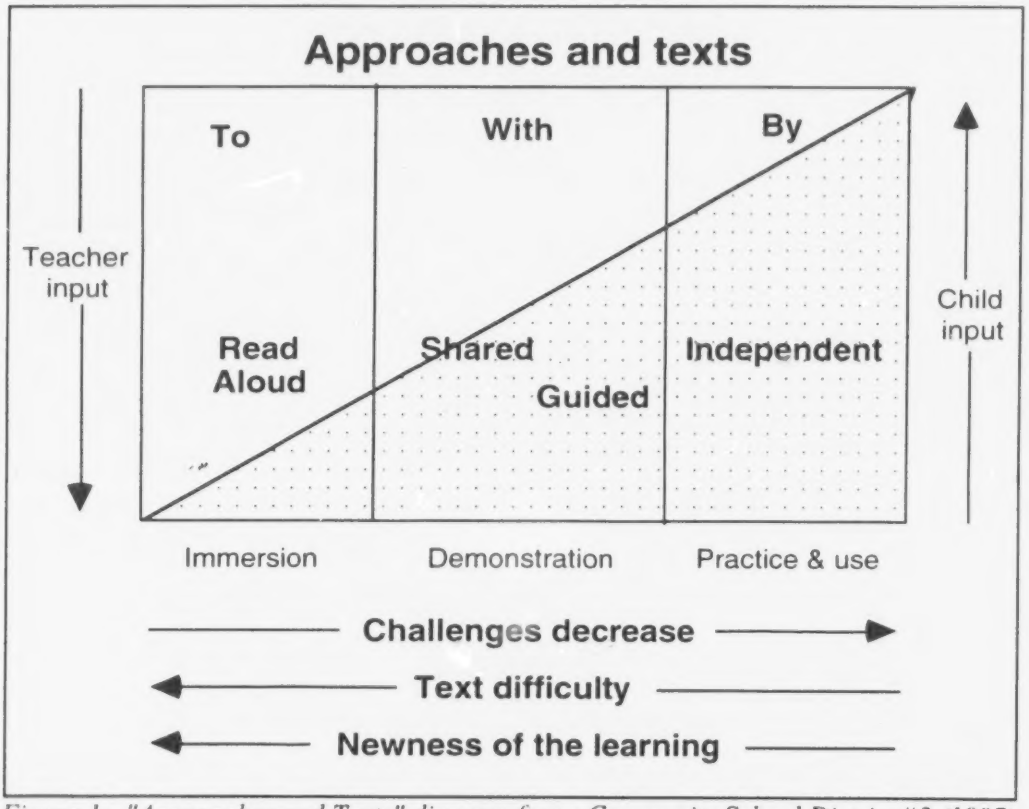

Figure 1: "Approaches and Texts" diagram from: Community School District #2 (1997). Extended School Year (1997): Staff Developer's Guide.

As shown in Figure 1, reading with occurs during the Shared Reading and Guided Reading segments. *Shared Reading* consists of the teacher reading fairly challenging, large-print text along with the students in chorus. The district views Shared Reading as a

time for the teacher and more capable students to demonstrate the appropriate use of broad, general reading strategies in the context of an enjoyable, whole-class reading experience. These broad, general reading strategies include: how to read text for meaning, predicting how text will develop, attending to the layout and structure of text, and mastering fluent oral phrasing. During Shared Reading, less-capable students are able to read more difficult material than they would be able to alone. Shared Reading represents a fairly high amount of teacher support because the teacher actually reads the text along with the students and has planned teaching points to help the students decode and comprehend the text or focus on and practice specific reading strategies..

Guided Reading involves teaching a small, carefully selected group of students, reading strategies that are tailored to their needs and to the text. The reading strategies focused on in Guided Reading are more narrow and specific to individual children's needs, for example, how to use multiple cueing systems to identify unknown words (i.e., sound, meaning, and picture cues). Guided Reading is considered to be the heart of the Balanced Literacy Program because teachers provide students with direct instruction in specific strategies that are needed to move them to the next level. During Guided Reading, the teacher is seen as supplying a moderate amount of support to students who are expected to carry out the actual reading. The teacher's responsibility is to group children appropriately (based on frequent individual assessments of actual reading) and to provide the groups with strategies that are specifically tailored for them.

Reading by occurs when students read texts *independently* and silently to themselves. District leaders view Independent Reading as an authentic form of reading in life -- a form of reading that students need to engage in every day if they ultimately are to become life-long readers.[2] Independent reading is seen as a vital component of their literacy program, a time when students have the luxury of an uninterrupted block of reading time with a book of their choice for which there is no specific goal (i.e., students are not "tested" or held accountable for the material). Students read books that are within their current proficiency level, and are expected to apply strategies that they have learned in Shared and/or Guided Reading settings. In this format, support is primarily in the form of self-assistance.

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[2] In their materials, the district cites research which suggests that 25 minutes or more of daily uninterrupted reading yields maximum vocabulary growth. For many of the students in the district, daily sustained reading time is often available only during school.

A key to effective implementation of the Balanced Literacy program is offering students increasing degrees of challenge coupled with exactly the right kinds and levels of assistance. This, in turn, depends on teachers' abilities to accurately assess students' reading capacities. While children are engaged in Independent Reading, the teacher is expected to perform individual student assessments. These assessments involve listening to a student Read Aloud, noting his or her struggles and errors (sometimes on a formal assessment form known as a running record), and discussing the student's comprehension of the material. The success of Guided Reading depends upon accurate assessment of the difficulties that individual children are experiencing followed by the delivery of direct instruction in the specific strategies needed to move a group of similarly challenged students to the next level. Similarly, the fruitfulness of Independent Reading depends on children having ready access to books that are individually gauged to their current level of proficiency.

In recent years, their literacy-related efforts through this program have begun to bear fruit—the district has risen from the middle of the pack to second among New York's 32 community school districts on standardized achievement tests in literacy. Over the years, district leaders have refined their literacy program. They've tightened and more clearly defined the overall contours of the program, as well as added or elaborated on specific program components. The advent of extended-day and extended-year programs in the Spring and Summer of 1997 provided district leaders with the opportunity to set forth specific guidelines for the program. See Figure 2 below for a description of the format for the extended-year program.

In the extended year guidelines, district leaders recommend a particular sequence and specific amounts of time for each of the Balanced Literacy components. Once developed, these guidelines -- known as the Literacy Block Structure -- became a touchstone or point of reference for district leaders in their ongoing communications with heads of school about how literacy instruction should proceed, even during the regular school day and school year.

The Literacy Block guidelines convey important messages about district beliefs and expectations. First, the guidelines send an unambiguous signal about the overall priority to be given to literacy instruction in the district. The literacy block structure provides for a total of 170 minutes (2.8 hours) of literacy instruction per day - an amount of time that district leaders would ideally like to see maintained during the regular school year.

Recognizing that providing 2.8 hours of literacy each morning during the regular school year may not be possible, district leaders have communicated that literacy should occur for *at least* ***a two-hour*** *block of time each morning* and that the remaining balance should be made up in the afternoon.

Structure of the Program

Reading Workshop, 1 hour 55 minutes	
9:00 - 9:25	Independent Reading
9:25 - 9:45	Shared Reading
9:45 - 10:05	Word Study
10:05 - 10:55	Guided Reading (2 groups)
	Reading Practice
10:55 - 11:05	Break
Writing Workshop, 40 minutes	
11:05 - 11:15	Mini-Lesson
11:15 - 11:35	Writing
11:35 - 11:45	Share Time and Responding
Read Aloud, 15 minutes	
11:45 - 12:00	Read Aloud
12:00 - 12:03	Take Home Book

Figure 2: "Structure of the Program" schedule taken from: Community School District #2 (1997). Extended School Year (1997): Staff Developer's Guide.

Second, recommendations identifying which components of the literacy block could be shifted to the afternoon hours shed light on the district's priorities *within* the literacy program. According to school lore, the prime time for learning is in the morning when students are more alert and there are apt to be few interruptions. District leadership therefore prefers that teachers make certain that those components of the Balanced Literacy Program which focus most directly on instruction—Shared Reading and Guided Reading—always be scheduled during the morning. If some of the components need to be

shifted to the afternoon in accordance with time constraints, they prefer that the shifted components be Independent Reading, Read Aloud or Writing activities. The message from this morning/afternoon split in their recommendations is clear: The instructional prime time of the day should be spent on *learning* to *read*. Even learning to write should not interfere with the primacy of that goal.

Third, the Literacy Block structure communicates the necessity of incorporating *all* of the components into the daily instructional routines of district classrooms. Each component embodies a specific kind of assistance, all of which are needed by each individual child to become a more proficient and independent reader. Children are expected to master increasingly challenging texts by engaging with others in the process of reading through carefully designed situations in which needed strategies are taught. District leaders stress that it is not the presence or absence of the components *per se* that is crucial; rather it is the instructional strategies that are taught and the kinds of support provided within each of the components that are most important for the teachers to implement and children to learn.

Finally, the addition of the Word Study component sends a clear signal that teachers need to pay more explicit attention to developing a phonetic base in children. Citing numerous observations of children struggling with letter-sound relationships which should have been automatic, district leaders decided that teachers needed more guidance in highlighting opportunities for "word work" by providing daily phonics instruction.

The district guidelines for literacy instruction are unique for a variety of reasons. They are exceedingly comprehensive and detailed, but not in the usual form of mandated curricula or rigid sets of teacher-proofed practices. Rather the details—in the form of programmatic guidelines -- offer an underlying philosophy and a set of strategies for putting that philosophy into action in the classroom. In addition, the guidelines reflect deep, substantive knowledge on the part of district leaders regarding how children learn to read and how instructional programs can be designed to support the learning-to-read process. As such, the guidelines reflect a deep reservoir of content knowledge and years of experience in observing and refining the implementation of the program in a variety of classrooms serving a variety of children.

Support and Monitoring of the Instructional Program

The district leaders have devised methods for supporting and monitoring the Balanced Literacy Program that are equally unique and comprehensive. The forms that these methods take and the surrounding organizational culture which supports them have been well-documented by Elmore under the rubric of the district's professional development practices. In this section we briefly highlight these forms of support and monitoring.

The district supports the implementation of the Balanced Literacy Program in a variety of ways. Periodic full- or half-day sessions are sponsored by the district for teachers who are new to teaching and/or inexperienced with the Balanced Literacy framework. These sessions are led by district staff developers who are intimately familiar with the district expectations and how they are actually being carried out in one or more schools' instructional programs. Two of these sessions were held in Fall 1997, both of which were observed for this paper.

District leaders adamantly state that, *alone*, these sessions would have limited impact. Over time, the district has developed a human infrastructure for providing *ongoing* assistance to teachers after they return to their classrooms and begin implementing the Balanced Literacy program. This infrastructure is supported by a deeply ingrained culture of professionalism that encourages teachers to take ongoing personal responsibility for continually upgrading their knowledge and skills. Within this culture, classroom-based assistance is available to teachers in a range of formats including the Professional Development Lab (where an inexperienced teacher works alongside an experienced teacher for a specified number of weeks), intervisitations (where teachers visit classrooms and schools designated as demonstration sites), and school-based professional developers who observe and teach in classrooms on a regular basis.

District leadership also has developed a variety of strategies for monitoring the kinds of literacy practices regularly occurring in schools. First, they recruit, select, and oversee the professional developers who work in the area of literacy with teachers and principals in schools. Bea Johnstone, the district's Director of Professional Development, views her job as making sure the professional developers do not veer too far from district goals and philosophy. Second, district leaders select and train principals to closely oversee the literacy practices occurring in their buildings. District principals are expected to be expert in the area of literacy themselves, to attend professional

development with their teachers, and to provide instructional leadership to the teaching staff in their buildings. This includes frequent visits to classroom to follow up on staff development and make sure that teachers who need additional support and training get it. Finally, district leaders monitor instructional quality first hand. Each school is visited at least once a year by the Deputy Superintendent and the Director of Professional Development. During these visits, known as walkthroughs, each and every classroom is visited and the quality of their instructional program assessed.

Overall, two features of the district's approach to professional development stand out: (a) the extent to which professional development is incorporated into the day-to-day professional culture and work practices of the district, rather than existing as a stand-alone function; and (b) the manner in which support and accountability are designed to work hand-in-hand. As such, Elmore's characterization has been immensely useful for understanding how the district manages professional development, including their attention to the social configurations that promote the uptake and spread of good literacy practices in classrooms.

This articulation of district strategies for support and monitoring of instructional practice is less useful, however, for identifying *what* gets taught and how decisions are made about what gets taught *to whom, how, and when*. For example, how do leaders decide which teachers would benefit most from which kinds of professional development sessions? What issues are considered when arranging an intervisition? (i.e., what is observed? why? and with what preparation and reflection?) What aspects of teaching performance lead to the recommendation that a school-based professional developer work in a given teacher's classroom? When is it time to move on? These are content-driven questions that beg for an explication of a theory of teacher performance and learning.

Literacy in the Classrooms

The manner in which the literacy program was enacted in our sampled classrooms will be discussed in three sections. First, we present the results of a structural analysis which provide a rough gauge of the degree of congruence between classroom practice and district guidelines. Then we identify and discuss the kinds of variations that were observed from the District #2 recommended program. We begin by exploring variations as they occurred across the three different schools, thereby building on the

organizationally and culturally driven explanation of variation offered by Elmore and Burney. We then explore variation from a learning perspective asking the question: How did differences in the way in which the Balanced Literacy program was implemented relate to characteristics of teachers as learners? By highlighting issues of teacher performance and learning (through vignettes), we identify a set of features that could form the nucleus of a theory of teacher learning that would complement District #2's current articulation of professional development.

Congruence with Literacy Program

The average amount of time devoted to district-recommended literacy activities across all 27 observations was 1.8 hours per observation, very close to the two hours set forth by the district.[3] When additional "other literacy" activities[4] were included in the total amount of morning time devoted to literacy, the average increased to 2.1 hours. Of the total block of time devoted to literacy, the district recommends that approximately two-thirds of it (68%) be allocated to Reading Workshop components (i.e., Independent reading, Guided Reading, Word Study, and Shared Reading), approximately one-quarter to writing activities (23%), and around 10% to Read Aloud. The average percentage of time devoted to these three activities, across the 27 observations, varied somewhat from those recommendations. In general, proportionately *less* time was spent on Reading Workshop activities then recommended (only 45%) and proportionally *more* time was spent on Writing then recommended (31%). The amount of time spent on Read Aloud (10%) was on target.

As described earlier, District #2's Balanced Literacy program is comprised of several interlocking and mutually supportive components. The underlying philosophy stresses the importance of children engaging in Independent Reading, Shared Reading, Word Study,

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[3] It is important that the reader keep in mind that the analysis of *time* spent on literacy described below are *only* for observations done during the *morning*. District #2 strongly encourages that the bulk of literacy instruction occur in the morning when students minds are fresh. However, as mentioned earlier, time constraints may lead teachers to regularly conduct some portion of their literacy instruction in the afternoon. We urged all teachers to stick to their normal routines. In three observations, unusual schedule interruptions were cited as reasons for shifting some or all literacy activities to the afternoon.

[4] Although not representative of district-recommended activities, these "other" forms of literacy-related activities presented students with fairly structured and focused opportunities to read or write. These activities included "settling in" routines that focused on reading or writing; morning meetings during which children read a narrative form of the daily schedule aloud together; a "shopping" period during which children selected books for their personal reading baskets; and whole-class discussions regarding how one selects a book.

Guided Reading, Read Aloud, and Writing activities[5] on a daily basis. In our analyses, we identified the number of days (out of a potential of 27) that each of these components was observed. The most consistently implemented component was Writing, which was observed in 25 of the 27 mornings (93%). Guided Reading was the next most consistently implemented of the reading components (81% or 22 mornings observed). Shared Reading and Read Alouds were seen in slightly over half of our observations (59% and 52% respectively). Those components which were implemented the least often included Independent Reading[6] and Word Study; both of which were observed in only 22% (6 days) of the classroom observations.

The above findings suggest that teachers appear to have received and bought into the district's message that their primary mission should be to teach literacy. The teachers in our sample spent the lion's share of the morning hours—those prized hours during which students are freshest and most apt to be engaged—doing district-recommended literacy activities and/or engaging their students in some other form of literacy activity. Subjects other than literacy were observed on only four occasions before the lunch break and students left the classroom for instruction in "specials" (computers, science, and art) during only three of the observed mornings.[7] Finally, mathematics was the only subject area other than literacy *always* included in the full-day schedule. It usually occurred during the afternoon and rarely had more than 40 minutes dedicated to it. Thus, it is clear that literacy is the instructional focus of these classrooms.

Less clearly accepted, however, is the idea that reading is more crucial than writing and therefore should receive a much greater proportion of the morning literacy block time. On average, teachers tended to spend roughly similar amounts of time on writing and reading (45% and 31% respectively), whereas the district recommends an allocation that is closer to a 3 to 1 ratio of reading to writing. This finding is supported by the component analysis which shows writing as the most frequently observed instructional activity during the morning hours. This preponderance of morning writing activity (which tended to be lengthy) had the effect of "crowding" out some of the reading components.

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[5] Although the district also subdivides the writing component into subsections (mini-lesson, actual writing time, and writing share), we do not here report results for each subsection.

[6] Students reading by themselves was counted as "Independent Reading" when it occurred as the focal form of instruction during that portion of the class and not when it was conducted simultaneously while Guided Reading groups were meeting.

[7] Most of these non-literacy activities were observed in third grade classrooms, which have later lunch periods and therefore much longer mornings.

Finally, the structural analysis suggests that the district's emphasis on Guided Reading as the heart of the Balanced Literacy Program has been clearly transmitted to teachers: Guided Reading was implemented in 22 out of the 27 observations. However, it is important to note that this analysis does not identify the extent to which the *intent* of Guided Reading—direct instruction in specific reading strategies geared to individual needs—was fulfilled. The structural analysis also raises questions about why daily implementation of the other components was not observed. Shared Reading and, especially, Independent Reading and Word Study appeared to be vulnerable to removal from the morning's schedule of activities. In some cases, these components appeared to be crowded out by writing activities; in other cases, they were replaced by literacy activities that were not a standard part of the district's recommended program. In order to understand these variations more deeply, qualitative examinations of classroom write ups were undertaken. The first examination of the qualitative data suggested it would be useful to look at variation between schools.

Variations across Schools

The 27 classroom observations were conducted in three schools. Our first review of classroom writeups and interview transcripts suggested that teachers within a given school were apt to be more like one another than they were to be like teachers in either of the other schools. In general, teachers within a given school expressed a similar vision regarding instructional aims and practices. Moreover, the daily schedules, classroom routines, and classroom set ups (e.g., how classroom libraries were organized) tended to be similar across teachers in a given school.

What were the identifying characteristics of the literacy program as observed in each of these schools? **School C** teachers implemented a morning literacy program that—in form—was almost completely congruent with the literacy block structure set forth by the district. Of all three schools, they not only devoted the greatest amount of time to literacy activities (an average of 1.93 hours per morning) but that time was almost completely comprised of activities that were recognizable as either Writing, Shared Reading, Independent Reading, Read Aloud, or Guided Reading. There was little inclusion of non-sanctioned forms of literacy activities.

In addition, the proportion of time spent on reading vs. writing activities in School C was congruent with District expectations. Of all three schools, the teachers in School C were least likely to allow writing to take over the morning schedule. Although we

witnessed students writing in eight out of the nine observations, these sessions never lasted more than 60 minutes (μ=29 minutes), nor were they ever followed by a writers' share. In comparison, there was an average of 77 minutes spent on Reading Workshop activities, resulting in a little better than a 2 to 1 ratio of time spent on reading versus writing in School C. Finally, observers were more likely to see *all* of the Balanced Literacy Components implemented during any given morning in School C than in either of the other two schools. Guided Reading groups were observed in *each* classroom *each* day; Shared Reading occurred in seven out of the nine observations, and Independent Reading was observed here more than in any of the schools.

The teachers in **School A**, like those in School C, devoted a considerable block of time to literacy each morning (1.88 hours, on average). However, observers were more likely to find "other literacy" activities occurring here than in School C. These activities included collectively writing a class letter, an ESL lesson, or reading and discussing a letter written by one of the students in the class. Like their counterparts in School C, the teachers in School A allocated more time on reading activities (μ=65 minutes) than writing (μ=36 minutes) at a ratio of almost 2 to 1. Moreover, their writing activities were seldom extended by long periods of writers' share. In School A, we also witnessed Guided Reading groups as the centerpiece of *each* morning's activity in *each* classroom; and Shared Reading was observed in six out of the nine observations. However, compared to School C, we saw significantly fewer sessions of Independent Reading.

In contrast to the other two schools, the instruction in **School B** was the most divergent from district guidelines. Data from School B suggested its teachers were implementing some ideas about literacy instruction that did not come directly from the Balanced Literacy Program. Three deviations standout. First, their program placed a much greater emphasis on writing instruction than recommended by the district—43% as opposed to the recommended 31% of the total time devoted to literacy.[8] The time spent on reading in School B (μ=31 minutes) compared to writing (μ=54 minutes), resulted in ratios opposite of that in Schools A and C—nearly 2 to 1 in favor of *writing*. Not only did students have the opportunity to write in eight out of the nine observations, but they also spent considerable amounts of time sharing their written products. These "writers

[8] While observations in School B included special activities that "broke up" the morning, writing was never eliminated from the daily schedule, whereas on two of the nine mornings observed, one classroom had no Reading Workshop at all.

share" times aimed to (a) publicly celebrate good work; and (b) help children to develop specific criteria by which to judge written work.

Second, School B teachers spent considerable amounts of times on "other" literacy activities not represented in the Literacy Block structure. Twenty-one percent of the time devoted to literacy in School B (on average, a half-hour per day) was spent in these "other" literacy activities which included "shopping" (children peruse the classroom library to select books for their personal reading baskets); and discussions about choosing an appropriate book. These types of activities reflect the teachers' goals of developing independent readers. According to interview data, School B teachers believe that the creation of independent readers depends on children being supported in their awareness of their interests in particular genres/authors and in their ability to select books at the appropriate levels of difficulty. As a result, these teachers have committed substantial amounts of time to discussing criteria for book selection and to letting students practice selecting books for their personal reading baskets.

Finally, of all the teachers in the three schools, teachers in School B were least likely to incorporate *all* the Balanced Literacy components into any given morning's activities. In particular, we saw limited attempts to conduct Guided Reading groups, no time devoted to Word Study, and only one session of Independent Reading. On the other hand, we did see a very structured and comprehensive program of Partner Reading carried out in School B. Two of the teachers spent considerable amounts of time setting up reading partners, discussing what the characteristics of good partner reading were, and actually having their students engage in Partner Reading.[9] During Partner Reading time, the teachers conferenced with individual students or with pairs of students. At least two of these teachers explicitly noted that they felt that they were accomplishing the goals of Guided Reading during these individual conferences.

What might account for these different profiles of literacy instruction in each of the schools? Part of the answer lies in school-level variables. Indeed, these between-school differences can be seen as reflecting the district's strategy for school improvement which places a great deal of weight on principals and their ability to create strong, unified learning communities within their schools. In addition, different schools receive different kinds of attention from the district administration. For example, a group of schools that

[9]The third teacher incorporated partner reading in a fashion similar to the other two teachers but as part of her independent reading structure.

consistently perform below district expectations on standardized tests of reading achievement have been designated as Focus Literacy schools. The principals and teachers in Focus Literacy schools receive much more intensive support for their instructional programs (e.g., extra teachers for push-in activities, more resources for Reading Recovery, extra professional development sessions) and tighter oversight. While district leaders visit better-performing schools an average of once per year, they visit Focus Literacy Schools as often as three or four times in a given year. Moreover, they are more precise about their expectations for literacy instruction, usually demanding adherence to a morning program that deviates little from the Literacy Block Structure.

Schools A and C have been designated as Focus Literacy schools. Although each has a dynamic principal that has overseen dramatic, school-wide turnarounds, these two schools continue to experience their share of challenges with regard to the literacy development of their students. Both schools educate student populations of which over 85% are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch; nearly half of School A's student population is classified as limited English proficient, as is 20% of School C's population. Compared to other urban schools across the nation, School A and School C's reading achievement scores are good; compared to District #2 expectations, however, they are in need of improvement. School C has shown extremely uneven performance over the past several years and School A, while posting impressive gains recently, has historically scored among the lowest performing group of District #2 schools. Both schools performed in the lowest quartile of District #2 schools on the New Standards English Arts examination in Spring 97.

As Focus Literacy schools, Schools A and C receive tighter oversight than does School B, which has fewer students on free and reduced lunch (51%), fewer LEP students (11%) and higher achievement profiles on both standardized and New Standards examinations. In particular, School C was closely monitored after a recent unanticipated dip in achievement scores. District leaders conducted frequent walkthroughs of the building, and stressed the importance of teachers adhering to the Balanced Literacy guidelines. They also emphasized the importance of devoting the morning hours to reading, urging the principal to monitor what was perceived to be an overemphasis on writing during the morning.

Our interview data suggest that teachers' perceptions of what they are expected to do align with the message that the district purports to be sending. Teachers in Schools A

and C were more aware of and committed to the structural aspects of District #2's Balanced Literacy program compared to those in School B. An unexpected event that occurred during our data collection cycle is telling in this regard. In School C, our observations were done during a week in which district leaders were scheduled to conduct a walkthrough of the school. The morning of the walkthrough, the principal reminded the teachers of the district's commitment to the Balanced Literacy program and requested that they check any special, non-Balanced Literacy activities they had planned with the principal before proceeding. One of our observed teachers was asked if the principal's request would change the way she would teach that day. She replied, "No," and then explained that the principal's directions were to follow the Balanced Literacy program and that was what she did every day. Her explanation indicated that she had both an *explicit* and *detailed* awareness of the structure recommended by District #2 and, for the most part, attempted to follow it:

> [The principal] gave us a sheet that said that this is what we should be doing at different times in the morning. Nine to 9:25 DEAR[10], then Share, then Word Study, then two Guided Reading groups while reading practice is going on. Then a break. Then Writing: mini-lesson, writing, share and respond.

The awareness of the "official" Literacy Block structure demonstrated in this quotation reflects the "culture of alignment" that we sensed in School C. In contrast, when asked to explain differences between her modal instructional practice and the structure given by the district, a teacher from School B explained:

> The way that it's set up in the handouts that we've gotten from District #2, it is very structural. From 9 to 9:15 we should be doing this and from 10 to whatever . . . . The way it was sort of presented to us [the teachers in School B] is that your mornings should be filled with literacy. Morning being from the time kids get in to 11 or 12 depending on whatever happens, you know a special schedule or a special visitor, or prepare for pictures, or whatever. But *loosely* it should be literacy. But it doesn't necessarily matter so much that its between 9 and 9:15 it's Read Aloud and then it needs to be this and then it needs to be this. (emphasis ours)

When asked where she gets this message, the teacher responded:

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[10]DEAR stands for "Drop Everything And Read" and is sometimes used by district teachers instead of the term "Independent Reading."

> I guess its just more a feeling that all the times that our principal has come in to visit she has never once said, "Oops, it's 9:15 and you're not doing this." Really, the most important thing is that the morning is filled with literacy, it's not so much the time structure. That's just, I guess, the sense I get. I don't know. No one said it so much, but . . . .

Strictly adhering to the Balanced Literacy structure outlined by District #2 appears to be much less critical to this teacher than to the teacher from School C. Overall, the "structural" part of the district's Balanced Literacy program was part of the institutional conversation in School C; whereas in School B, it is no more than a handout, the exact contents of which are somewhat hazy.

The above discussion of structural alignment can be easily interpreted within an accountability framework. As such, it provides an explanation for variation that aligns with teachers' interpretations of how much discretion they have to follow or not follow the components, ordering, and pacing schedule as outlined in the Literacy Block Structure. Teachers' perceptions of the amount of latitude they have, in turn, relate to the district's judgments of the quality of teacher and student performance in that school. The overriding message is: If your school is doing well, you have certain degrees of freedom to deviate; if your school is not doing as well, you are expected to adhere to the Literacy Block Structure. According to Elmore, this differential treatment of schools by district leaders strikes to the heart of the ways in which systemic change is handled within District #2 (see discussion of "with-the-drill" vs. "watch-list" schools in Elmore & Burney, 1997).

A school-by-school categorization is less useful, however, as an explanation for other kinds of variation that we observed. For example, among teachers who *are* following the program structure, is there variability in terms of *how* and *how well* they are implementing the program? Moreover, are there different ways of, or reasons for, *not* following the program structure? (i.e., is the variation observed in School B acceptable within the district framework or not?) A more thorough articulation of the district leaders' theory of teacher learning would support a deeper exploration of these issues. Just as knowledge of the learning-to-read process undergirds recommendations for how to teach children, knowledge of the learning-to-teach process forms a foundation for decisions regarding how tu support individual teachers.

Teacher Learning Interpretation of Variation

When Elmore and Burney describe between-school treatment differences, they note differences in the amount of professional development support and degree of oversight. When Bea Johnstone, the director of professional development, talks about differences in the way in which the Literacy Block Structure is applied to different teachers and schools, she stresses (what we interpret to be) a teacher learning perspective. Johnstone has warned that the Literacy Block guidelines could easily convey the wrong impression that district leaders are primarily, perhaps even solely, concerned with the number of minutes that teachers spend on each of the Balanced Literacy components. She emphatically states that this is not case. Their goal, according to Johnstone, is to get each teacher to the point where she understands each of her students deeply and can plan and deliver instruction to meet that child's needs. They see the Literacy Block structure as something that teachers need *as they are learning how to do this.* The structure serves as a scaffold until teachers become expert enough to plan and deliver instruction on their own.

With the Balanced Literacy Program, district leaders have clearly articulated their approach to literacy practice in classrooms. By comparison, their approach to teacher learning has remained largely implicit. Although district leaders' actions appear to be guided by a shared framework (or theory), this framework remains unarticulated to a wider audience. In this section of the paper, we offer a set of features that might be included in a theory of teacher leaning within District #2. These features have been identified from our vantage point as outside observers of classroom activity. They are not meant to be comprehensive; nor does the inclusion of a particular feature mean that district leaders do not attend to it, only that they have not, to our knowledge, articulated *how* they deal with it for a wider audience.

To identify potentially relevant features of a theory of teacher performance and learning, we searched our data base for situations in which teachers were <u>not</u> implementing the Balanced Literacy program as specified. We looked for instances of (a) instruction that alligned structurally with the Balanced Literacy guidelines and seemed faithful to the program's intent, but in the enactment fell short of the ideal; (b) instruction that aligned structurally with the Balanced Literacy guidelines, but appeared to fall short of meeting the overall intention of the program; and (c) instruction that intentionally and purposefully deviated from the Balanced Literacy guidelines. We then reviewed our interview data to identify learning-related reasons which might underlay these variations.

These reasons fell primarily under the following categories: background knowledge, depth of understanding of the Balanced Literacy Program, and "going beyond the program." Presented below are a series of vignettes that are illustrative of these categories.

Teacher Background Knowledge

In order to implement the Balanced Literacy Program well, teachers need to make a set of complex instructional decisions which ideally results in a match between what the *student is ready to learn* and *what is to be learned*. These decisions, in turn, depend upon what we have come to think of as the "bookends of teacher knowledge." Supporting teachers' ways of knowing *what the student is ready to learn* is a recognizable feature of District #2 leaders' approach to teacher learning. They have fairly well-articulated methods for assessing students' writing and reading proficiencies and these methods are an important part of their professional development activities.

It is less clear how district leaders think about the second bookend of teacher knowledge, knowledge of *what is to be learned*.[11] What is the "map of the domain" that students are responsible for mastering and what do teachers need to know in order to teach it well? Based on our observations and interviews, we'd argue teachers need to have detailed knowledge of children's literature (e.g., titles, authors, genre, how to judge quality, etc.) and word and sentence structures (phonics, grammar, etc.) as well as knowledge of how to *integrate and transform* these two bodies of content knowledge for instructional purposes.[12] Our data suggest that for many teachers these knowledge demands can be quite daunting. As one third-year teacher explained:

> I've only been teaching for three years and I'm not that familiar with that many pieces of literature. So how, as a new teacher, am I supposed to come up with something for Read Aloud every day, two or three pieces for Guided Reading every day, something for Shared Reading each week, and Independent Reading? . . . I'm working really hard at it, so I'm okay at it, but I don't feel like its a . . . . I do a lot of work at home. I don't feel its manageable. So I'm trying to figure out a way to make it manageable.

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[11] We are referring to the knowledge and skills that teachers must possess in order to teach the Balanced Literacy program well. We do know that a fair amount of attention has been devoted to the codification of teaching strategies within the program.

[12] Teaching researchers refer to this type of teacher knowledge as "pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman).

She adds that despite visiting other classrooms and having spoken to a number of teachers, she doesn't know a single teacher who does not have similar difficulties.

The struggles of teachers to command the background knowledge necessary for effective literacy instruction is not only limited to building an awareness of available children's literature. Knowledge of word and sentence structures, which they themselves have learned as children, may no longer be an *explicit* part of a teacher's knowledge base and therefore not readily available to them when planning instruction.

An example of such knowledge needs comes from Justine's[13] third-grade classroom. One morning before class, Justine excitedly showed an observer a book she had just purchased, *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists*. As she handed it to the observer, she said, "By the way, this is one of the greatest books, I finally just got my own copy yesterday in the mail." At the observer's request, she then explained why the book was so useful: "It's a book of lists, like all the lists that you could possibly want. Examples of everything. And it's really terrific. I keep borrowing [my colleague's] edition of it and she's about to kill me so I'm glad I got my own."

In Justine's mind, a major strength of this book is its ability to remind her of what she already knows. She said, "You know things and you forget exactly how you know them, or you forget how to tell kids the exact wording of it or the rule. You want it to be in their own words if they remember it but ..." Justine believes in building students' understanding by using their own ideas, but she worries that students' constructions may omit important terminology and concepts. She guards against such omissions by checking this book for both the ideas each list contains and the wording used. In this way, she feels more confident that she will not forget to add important concepts or terminology that her students may miss on their own.

Justine described how she referred to the book when constructing a lesson on the conventions for forming plurals, "I didn't want to leave out any rules for plurals. I know how to turn-- You know, I know spelling so I know how to turn words into plurals, but when you are a student, don't you need to know all the rules?" These are the words of a dedicated teacher who is striving to solidify her domain knowledge before conducting a lesson in a specific area. However, unfortunately for Justine, such efforts may not be

[13] All teachers are referred to by pseudonyms.

enough to prepare her for all the instructional contingencies that will play out in the classroom.

During the week Justine was observed, her Word Study focused on the conventions for constructing plurals. The week long focus was a response to a problem she had noted in the children's writing; a significant portion of the students were having difficulties knowing when and how to use nouns in their plural forms. The introductory lesson built upon the student intuitions for singular and plural words. Justine listed five sentences on a large piece of paper on an easel. Each sentence included one word which was covered with a post-it note that had another word written on it. For example, she wrote the sentence "John has 5 book" and covered the number "5" with a post-it that had the word "a" on it. The sentence with the post-it read, "John has a book."

During the lesson the students read the first sentence. Then, the teacher removed the post-it to reveal the sentence, "John has 5 book." Students immediately complained that the second sentence did not sound right. Justine then asked them how to fix it. Four of the five sentences each demonstrated a regular convention for plurals: (1) add an "s"; (2) add an "es"; (3) remove the "y" and add "ies"; (4) remove the "f" or "fe" and add a "ves". The fifth one gave an example of an irregular plural (foot/feet). After completing all five sentences, Justine asked the students to articulate and describe a rule for the kind of change they made in each case, except the irregular one. Overall, the students were highly engaged in this activity and Justine did an excellent job of making explicit to them that in many ways they already instinctively *knew* the conventions, they just needed to know they knew them.

For the rest of the week, Justine had the students look for both plural and singular forms of words while reading. They then listed these words, in both forms, along with the rules that describe the conventions to which they adhere in their notebooks. In a follow-up lesson later in the week, Justine asked the students to "share" some of the plurals they had found and written down. As the students offered words, Justine wrote them on a large piece of paper on an easle in three columns: one for the singular form, one for the plural and one for the rule that applies. Through this process a potential problem emerged.

Students on occasion would suggest as singular/plural pairs words that were not nouns, but verbs. The suggestion "know/knows" made by one student may have been the

result of over-generalizing the "add an 's'" rule to include words that were not nouns. Justine's response to such suggestions may have been somewhat hampered by the fact that at no time during the initial lesson or the follow-up lessons, did she ever explain that they were talking about regular conventions for singular and plural *nouns*. The distinction between the forms of speech, "noun" and "verb" was never discussed, neither by use of the explicit labels "noun" and "verb" nor with less technical terms such as "things or objects" versus "something you do". For example, Justine's response to the student who suggested "know/knows" was limited to questions such as, "Is that a plural? Is it more than one?" One student suggested "wear/wore" as a singular and its plural. In this case she explained to the student that "wear" meant the present and "wore" meant the past, "not making one thing more", but she still did not make a distinction between noun and verb, object and action.

Although most of the suggestions made by the students were singular and plural nouns, the handful of verb offerings and the teacher's response to them raises questions: When Justine was planning the plurals lesson, had it occurred to her that a possible student response might be to present verb pairs, such as "know" and "knows" or "wear" and "work" instead of nouns? Since the lesson itself was a specific response to a specific perceived problem in her students' writing, addressing various grammatical forms may not have occurred to her and the two verb pairs suggested by students may have caught her by surprise. Justine corrected the students' errors by asking probing questions which had them reconsider their suggestions, but those questions may not have addressed a potential source of their confusion—the difference between nouns and verbs. Did she feel the students were not ready for such an explanation? Did she not feel she could produce an adequate one at the time? Did she feel such an explanation was either unnecessary, tangential or inappropriate? Was she under time constraints that led her to believe she did not have time to address the issue? Did she perhaps miss the significance of these two student suggestions and what they might imply about student understanding? If so, why did she miss it? Because of the pace of the lesson? Because other student activity distracted her attention? To make such instructional decisions a teacher needs to understand the complex relationships *between* the different parts of speech and how to make those distinctions clear to the students in the context of classroom activity. Did her own knowledge of the domain not yet include such links? Will this experience change either how she conducts the lesson or responds to student suggestions in the future?

The complexity of knowledge needs increases when knowledge of children's literature is added to the mix. As Justine explains, besides *knowing* what children's literature exists, one also needs to know which pieces are good for particular instructional purposes:

> The teachers who have been teaching longer have that benefit that they are familiar [with children's literature] . . "OK, I need a lesson to teach, "like we were doing plurals". I need a Shared Reading piece to teach plurals," they think in their mind. They can think of a piece that has lots of examples of plurals. But me, as a newer teacher, I have more trouble with that because I have to look and look and look and it takes a very long time and its hard.

It is clear from this comment that these two sets of knowledge—children's literature and word or grammatical structures—become interlocked at the instructional level. The Balanced Literacy Program's approach of using children's literature to teach reading demands a particularly comprehensive and interconnected knowledge base. Not only must teachers possess two distinct bodies of content knowledge (children's literature and phonics / grammar), they must also possess the pedagogical content knowledge that allows them to pull together these two domains of knowledge in order to address instructional goals. With deep and interconnected knowledge bases, teachers will be better able to (a) respond flexibly to student constructions, knowing when and how to connect them to maps of the content domain; and (b) plan instructional sequences that will, over time, provide opportunities for students to encounter the "big ideas" in a given content domain. Without such a knowledge base, instructional actions become totally dependent on emergent and/or opportunistic events--events which may or may not become fully realized as pieces of a larger, connected puzzle of domain knowledge.

Questions for a theory of teacher learning.

The above discussion points to the pivotal role that teachers' background knowledge plays in their ability to implement the Balanced Literacy Program well. District leaders' methods of assessing the depth of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge need be articulated, as well as the manner in which they deal with instances of limited background knowledge. For example, to what extent does a teacher's college preparation indicate her knowledge bases? How successful is curriculum (e.g., Open Court) as a scaffold for supporting weak teacher knowledge bases? In what other ways

can teachers' knowledge bases be shored up to enable them to teach effectively in this program?

Depth of Understanding of the Program

In order to implement the Balanced Literacy Program well, teachers must understand the "spirit" and overarching goals of the program, as well as the "letter" of the program (the component labels, ordering, and pacing guidelines of the Literacy Block structure). They must completely comprehend the principles on which the program is based including how each of these program components contributes to helping students learn to read. Without a deep awareness of these undergirding ideas, teachers will have difficulty negotiating the many on-line decisions that they face on a daily basis. The following vignette illustrates some of the trade-offs with which teachers are often faced.

Justine prefers to conduct Independent Reading later in the morning than recommended by the district for three reasons. First, she found that when she regularly scheduled Independent Reading first thing in the morning, many of her students came late to class and claimed that they hadn't really missed anything. Second, she likes students to use Independent Reading time to practice a strategy or an idea that had been talked about earlier in the morning. And finally, she finds that Independent Reading is the perfect complement to Guided Reading:

> One of the hardest things about teaching is being able to work with groups and have the rest of the kids be occupied doing something else [when there is just] one teacher in the room. So, we've been doing DEAR time since the very first day of school. They [the students] know what to do. They know how to do it. They know where to sit. They know that there are monitors who are watching them who are also reading at the same time. So, I like to do it [DEAR time] during [Guided Reading] group time.

Justine's comments reflect an instructional modification observed in many classrooms: holding Independent Reading time simultaneously with Guided Reading groups.

On the second day of our observation, Justine asked her students to look for plural and singular forms of words during their Independent Reading time.[14] She described her plan as follows:

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[14] This is the day that immediately followed the introductory plural lesson described in the previous section.

> Today my plan is to start with the Shared Reading, Word Study, plurals—what they've found so far—and go into my Guided Reading groups. While I'm doing Guided Reading groups the rest of the kids are going be doing DEAR time or buddy DEAR time. While they're doing DEAR time they're going to be looking for more plural words we can add to our list. While they're doing that, I'm going to work with my Guided Reading groups, but, then we're going to come back, and then we're going share what we found.

This "looking for plurals" activity was the only period of Independent Reading her students had on this particular day.

As a conscientious teacher who was attempting to follow district guidelines and comprehensively fit all components into her daily routine, Justine has made some adjustments that appear to be perfectly reasonable from a time and classroom management perspective. Independent Reading conducted during Guided Reading serves multiple goals: getting students to school on time, keeping students busy and quiet, and providing practice in a strategy learned earlier. From a student learning perspective, however, the goals of Independent Reading have been substantively altered. A focus during Independent Reading is appropriate but that focus should be directly related to decoding text and understanding meaning (i.e., practicing reading strategies). First and foremost, Independent Reading is meant to be a time set aside for students to be maximally and enjoyably immersed in texts of their own choosing. The "search for plurals" activity has the effect of splitting students' attention—the more attention students allocate to the word hunt, the less they will be attending to the actual task of *reading* (decoding text and understanding meaning), which is the primary goal of Independent Reading.

Comments made by a number of teachers during one of the observed professional development sessions suggest that Justine's instructional decisions are not atypical. For example, one teacher described her Independent Reading session having a task focus, which might result in the same potential problem of distracting students' attention from actual reading: "Reading alone is not enough to keep them [the students] engaged, I always give them a task," such as filling out a work sheet on story elements." Another teacher's comments confirmed Justine's assertion that Independent Reading is a convenient activity to do during Guided Reading. This teacher stated that she has her students do a lot of Independent Reading work while she does Guided Reading because the noise level of other activities distracts her from her work with the Guided Reading

groups. Furthermore, in the course of our work in classrooms, we have heard many teachers express frustration with "fitting in" all the Balanced Literacy components and still having time for work in other content areas such as science or mathematics. Thus, using Independent Reading as a background activity during Guided Reading may seem like a viable solution.

Questions for a theory of teacher learning.

Teachers constantly juggle multiple goals. The conditions under which these "juggling acts" violate the basic tenets and goals of the Balance Literacy Program need to be articulated. The more fully teachers understand the program, the more they will be able to make modifications that do not interfere with program intentions. Furthermore, the better prepared teachers are to anticipate and intelligently manage instructional dilemmas, the less likely they will be to abandon the goals of the program when problems arise. This suggests a need to articulate the district's theory of teacher learning with respect to: (a) methods for ensuring that deep understanding of goals and intent accompany training in components and strategies; and (b) ways of assisting teachers to make independent decisions about appropriate programmatic adjustments which remain true to the goals of the Balanced Literacy program.

Going Beyond the Program

The first two features—teachers' background knowledge and their depth of understanding of program components—are most applicable to teachers who are inexperienced with the Balanced Literacy program or teaching in general. But what about teachers who are veterans of the program and who feel that they have "gone beyond it?" How does the district (a) decide that a teacher has truly moved beyond the program? and (b) continue to work with that teacher?

Kimberly Pilcher is a case in point. Kimberly is one of the more experienced teachers that we observed. She is currently in her seventh year of teaching, the last five of which have been as a first-grade teacher in School B. She is clearly recognized both within and outside District #2 as an accomplished expert teacher of early literacy. Such recognition is manifest through her participation in a literacy leadership group organized by Columbia's Teacher's College. As part of this program Kimberly meets weekly with an intensive study group consisting of teachers from across the city. In addition to this

work, Kimberly also helps conduct weekend seminars and presentations at the university level on early literacy teaching and learning.

Kimberly questions what is meant by the term "Guided Reading" and believes more district-wide conversation is needed to answer this question. She herself does not conduct regular Guided Reading groups, but instead uses "Partner Reading" as her direct form of reading instruction. Students read books they have selected with a partner while Kimberly circulates among them, listening to them read and conferencing with them. Kimberly feels the kind of instruction she does during these reading conferences is as comprehensive, if not more so, than the kind of instruction which the district leaders expect to occur during Guided Reading sessions.

Along with her teacher colleagues, Kimberly has spent three years studying, experimenting with, and refining Partner Reading. She devoted a lot of time at the beginning of the school year to help her students learn how to select books which were appropriately challenging. The goal is for each pair to be reading books appropriate for their skill and comprehension level. This allows Kimberly to effectively target her instruction during individual conferences. During our observations, we noted that children knew what Partner Reading was, what behaviors were and were not acceptable during Partner Reading, and what was involved in making a "commitment" to a reading partner.

The district has several concerns about this model of reading instruction. Although they recognize Kimberly's competence and feel that most students in her classroom are making good progress, they worry whether she is able to work with all of her students on an individual basis as often as a Guided Reading format would allow. In addition, they are not certain that it is educationally sound to delegate all text selection to students who may not necesssarily choose texts at the right level of challenge. A final concern of district leaders is the "spread" of Partner Reading to other teachers in School B who are not as experienced as Kimberly and who may have more difficulty managing the program than Kimberly has. The other two teachers observed in school B were much less experienced than Kimberly and both were observed to be experimenting with similar forms of literacy instruction.

Questions for a theory of teacher learning.

The "Partner Reading" case brings up several questions from a teacher learning perspective. A scaffold is only functional while a building is under construction . Once

the building is completed and strong enough to stand on its own, the scaffold is superfluous and even distracting. How do district leaders decide which teachers represent "strong, self-supporting constructions" and which teachers continue to need the support of the Literacy Block scaffold? How do contextual issues play into that decision (e.g., issues such as the school in which a given teacher is located or the kinds of student populations she instructs)? On a more programmatic or organizational level, what kinds of avenues are there for well-rationalized variations on the Balanced Literacy program to have an impact on the program itself?

Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, we have attempted to bring to the foreground issues of teacher learning—issues which have germinated from our observation of classroom practice and interviews with district teachers. Viewing reform in District #2 through the lens of instruction and teacher learning has led to the following observations.

The Role of Content Knowledge

The issue of content knowledge is a deeply embedded, contributing factor to the effectiveness of the district's systemic instructional improvement effort. In our judgment, the influence of subject matter knowledge can be felt up and down the line in District #2. For example, the depth of subject matter knowledge in literacy possessed by district leaders is integral to their effectiveness as designers and monitors of this program. Without the intellectual power and credibility that their collective knowledge base brings to the table, the support and accountability functions that they fulfill would not have the impact they do at the educational core. Inside the classroom door, teaching and learning is always *about something*.

This suggests a possible corollary to Elmore's articulation of support and accountability working hand-in-hand. The effect of the interrelationship between support and accountability may depend upon who is at the helm. In the hands of competent, knowledgeable supervisors, it leads to better teaching and learning inside classrooms. In the hands of less competent and less knowledgeable supervisors, it may not have the same effect. In fact, some observational data leads us to suspect that strong accountability pressures coupled with teacher perception of lack of knowledge of school-

level supervisors may lead to deliberately superficial implementation of district programs on the part of teachers.

The above discussion naturally leads to the question of how reform in multiple subject matter areas can be managed. In how many subject matters can district leaders and principals be reasonably expected to become competent?

Dealing with the Situated Nature of Implementation

District leaders have designed a model literacy program. As with any program design, its real test lies in its implementation within complex, context-embedded, constraint-ridden classrooms. In these classrooms, teachers must constantly make decisions about which aspects of the program to hold onto, which to let go of, and how far to follow a creative urge. The field of educational reform would benefit greatly from an articulation of the mechanisms that District #2 has developed to acknowledge this very real world of classrooms *while at the same time* maintaining high and clear standards of literacy instruction. Part of the answer surely lies in the placement of professional development resources inside schools and classrooms as opposed to at the level of central offices. Another part of the answer, we suspect, lies in a deeper and more comprehensive description of the roles that these professional developers play and how their expertise is passed onto teachers.

Improving a Systemic Content-Driven Approach to Reform

Learning to recognize and productively use positive forms of variation would appear to be critical to the nourishment of a content-driven, systemic reform strategy such as District #2's. Classrooms are fertile environments for spawning such variations, some of which may suggest fruitful changes in district-level design of literacy instruction. The ways in classroom teachers, staff developers, and district leaders are encouraged to communicate about issues of variation and change in the Balanced Literacy Program needs to be further explored.

Appendix: Methodology

District View of Literacy

Our knowledge of the district's approach to instructional practices and professional development in literacy was informed by a set of books which provide a theoretical foundation for the district's work in literacy,[1] professional development materials produced by the district, observations of district-sponsored professional development sessions, and a number of conversations with the district's Director of Professional Development. The professional development materials were organized into a manual entitled, *Extended School Year (1997): Staff Developer's Guide*, a document produced by the district for the purposes of training the staff developers who would then train those teachers in the district who would be participating in the extended year program. It includes copies of the handouts and overheads the professional developers used in the training sessions as well as a description of the type of activities they conducted. In addition to this manual, copies of the handouts given to teachers during observed professional development sessions were collected and reviewed.

Interviews with the district's Director of Professional Development occurred informally on a number of occasions and formally on two occasions. The formal conversations occurred (a) after jointly observing a literacy block in a district classroom; and (b) after the analyses of district lessons were written by the two authors. The focus of both of these conversations was on clarifying district expectations regarding how literacy should be taught and learned in district classrooms.

Finally, the planning and implementation of two full-day, district-sponsored professional development sessions were observed. The purpose of these sessions was to introduce new teachers to the district's philosophy and expectations regarding their literacy program. We observed a meeting of the district's director of professional development and four professional developers, during which the agenda for the two

[1]Books which were reviewed with an eye to understanding the district's philosophy on literacy instruction include: *Guided Reading* by Fountas & Pinnell, *Literacy at the Crossroads* by Routman, *Beyond the Basal* and *Writing and Literature* by Atwell, and *Towards a Reading-Writing Classroom* by Butler and Turbill. Professional development materials were culled in an effort to distill the message(s) being sent to teachers about literacy instruction.

sessions was discussed and planned. We also observed the two sessions which were held during the fall of 1997.

Classroom Practice

Data on classroom practice consisted of observations of three days of literacy activity in three classrooms in each of three schools for a total of 27 classroom observations. The observations were conducted in schools which district leaders characterized as having made substantial turnarounds in terms of quality of instructional practice over the past 6-7 years.[2] Each has a principal (hired by Alvarado) who has been given credit for shaping the faculty and the climate for learning within their buildings. Each of the principals has urged their teachers to make liberal use of the district's offerings with respect to professional development in literacy.

The school principals were asked to nominate three teachers (in a spread from grades K to 3) who were excellent instructors and who would feel secure enough about their practice to have researchers observe and analyze it. Of the nine teachers selected, only one was a "veteran" teacher, with 20+ years of experience. (See Table 2 below.) The others all had less than ten years experience and over half had less than five. The classrooms selected by the principals were fairly evenly distributed across the grade range they were given.[3]

School	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade
A	3	5	4
B	7	2	2
C	7 (K/1), 20+ (K-2)	—	3

Table 1: Teacher experience (in years) of the teachers in each school by grade

[2] For more information about each of these schools, the reader is referred to a set of case studies also written under the auspices of the HPLC project.

[3] In Schools A & B, one first-grade, one second-grade, and one third-grade teacher was observed. In School C, one of the observed "first-grade" teachers actually teaches a K/1 class; the other "first grade" teacher is one of four teachers who team teach a double-sized K-2 classroom This teacher is primarily responsible for the first graders in this large class. Part of the time the class meets as a whole and part of the time they subdivide into grade level groups. When such subdivisions occurred, the observer followed this teacher and the first graders with which she was working.

Our method of sampling days/times of observations was purposely designed to yield data representative of naturally occurring instruction in good teachers' classrooms.[4] Each of the classrooms was observed from the beginning of the school day (8:40) until the class broke for lunch. Most classes were observed for three consecutive days, although breaks in the school schedule and other scheduling conflicts sometimes made *consecutive* observations impossible.

All teachers were observed by one of four observers; the primary observer of each day's lesson was responsible for completing the write-up for that day. The write-ups begin with an overview of the observation that chunks the time-span according to when instructional activities began and ended. This overview is followed by a narrative summary of the observed activities. Teachers were given copies of the write-ups for their classes and asked to comment on the validity of reporting and interpretations.[5]

All teachers were also interviewed about their practices. Most teachers were interviewed informally, with the observer taking advantage of times when the teacher appeared to have the freedom and inclination to talk about what was happening in the classroom. A few teachers were interviewed more formally, the week following the observations. The formal interviews and some of the informal ones were audiotaped. These tapes have been transcribed and, along with the write-ups and field constitute data sources upon which initial analysis of literacy practice is based.

The analyses for the present report used the completed write ups and fieldnotes and interview transcripts as data sources.

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[4] We realize that our presence in the classrooms may have altered some normal routines and that the amount of time that we were able to spend in each of the classrooms limited what we were able to see. Nevertheless, given that interpretations of instructional practice are often offered simply from teachers' self reporting of classroom practice (despite research which suggests the limitations in doing so [see Spillane, Stein & Henningsen]), we feel that the total of approximately 95 hours which we spent across nine classrooms warrants the judgments made in this paper.

[5] Some of the writeups given to teachers were partially completed. One teacher chose to comment. Interestingly, her comments centered on many of the same areas in which the researchers had difficulties making differentiation's (e.g., should independent reading during Guided Reading count as Independent Reading?) Analyses which required judgments regarding how a particular activity should be classified were made according to district guidelines, not teacher labeling. However, the variations are noted and addressed.